


ALCOA

**Spring
1981**







Microcosm

Volume VIII — Number 2
Copiah-Lincoln Junior College
Wesson, Mississippi

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Trio

by Don Hardy

Autumn Leaf

From birth stretching
Forth in miniature green
Wanting just another day of
Sunshine, your destiny
Hidden, your purpose devoid
Of the change of season.
Now you conform:
Now you permit
Nature to paint her golden
Promise upon your surface.
Behold you, Autumn Leaf,
More beautiful in death
Than life.

Dreams

Held by the night,
A prisoner in your mind;
You see pictures of
Nonexistant places.
Feeding from the imagination
They survive in the memory.
Floating images remembered
Clear as the morning light.
Dream your dreams,
Awaken and lose your sight.

Autumn Dream

Asleep in a world,
Wishing you were there.
Knowing you must return;
Holding on as long as you can.
Slipping into reality,
Your sight fades as
Morning light takes command.
Now you conform:
Now you permit
Nature to return you
Where dreams are fantasy
And life sunshine.

**First place award,
poetry, Microcosm**

The Star

by Sara Williamson

The star was no brighter than any other star in the sky. It was just one among the millions, no bigger, no brighter, no different. Or was it?

I remember watching as it began to grow brighter and bigger. The energy seemed to flow to this magnetic star. Some expected great things to happen to this star. Would it become a nova?

As the star continued to grow, one of its brothers began to grow too. Would they compete for energy? Skeptics said they would try to consume each other.

But this was not true of these brother stars. My star seemed to dim itself and let its older brother become the focus of attention as it grew. The energy it emitted seemed to create more energy. All of the other little stars around were almost invisible as the bursts of energy showered from its surface.

This young star was a nova within days and was still growing. How long could this last?

Suddenly like a shot, the nova burst into a shower of tear-shaped flames. The whole world felt the impact of this explosion. I grieved; so did the world. A star so young should not die.

My star, I liked calling it that, seemed to dim even more. It almost vanished from the sky. The light it emitted was so dull I thought it might disappear. Did it recognize the side-effects of power?

I watched and waited because I knew my star had the strength and the power to become a super-nova. Finally, it began to grow. It was a slow, day-by-day process. But I knew, deep down I knew, it could be the strongest, brightest star of the century.

Other people began to watch my star, and it soon began to command some of the attention that its brother star had known. Some even said it could be as bright as its brother. This star would not burn itself out and die. This one was smarter. Or was it?

It seemed to forget after a while about the lesson it had learned about power and about the bad things that can happen when one gets wrapped up in power. It was fast on its way to becoming a nova. Everyone was watching.

Bang! Another shot!

This star, my star, burst into red flames while the whole world watched in shock. How could this happen to two brother stars? Both were so promising, so young. Why is power important enough that stars will die just for the sake of being a nova, even for a little while?

**First place award,
informal essay, Mississippi
Junior College Creative
Writing Association**

The Wish of Gretel

by Holly Sides

My name is Gretel, and I am a stuffed bear who decorates my owner's room, or at least I like to think of myself as this. A lot of people my owner has shown me to think I'm cute because of my big brown eyes, but actually, I like the black and tan color that I inherited from my mother's side of the family because it makes me look distinguished.

My owner has thought sometimes of how lucky it must be to be stuffed. I guess she could be right. It is convenient. I have never had boyfriend problems, and of course, my parents have never once scolded me. My world has always been safe and secure, unless you count the time my owner's little sister tried pulling off my nose, or the time that furry hunk my owner calls a dog tried biting off my ear; but, other than that, things have been rather easy-going. And since I have never had to make decisions, and I have never been disappointed or hurt, my owner sometimes wonders what more I could wish for. Maybe in her eyes my happiness should be complete, and I should be satisfied, but if she would ask me what more I would wish for, this is what I would tell her.

Being stuffed can be convenient, but I'm sure being alive would be so much better. As I watch my owner scurry in and out of her room at her free will, I often wonder what it would be like to be alive, to jump off my shelf and to explore the world she sees everyday; to see the flowers, trees, water, and other dogs besides that furry little beast that comes into my owner's room to threaten me. Sometimes . . . I wish so desperately to taste pizza, to breathe the smoggy air, to talk about anything I want to someone who can hear me, and to move my bean-bag body from this hard seat of wood to another location of a softer disposition without any effort. All of that would be magnificent and jubilant, but out of everything I would like to do if I were alive, it would be to feel.

I know to feel means that you can be hurt, or happy, or angry, or surprised. (I learned all of this by peeking down at my owner from my shelf.) But to me, having feelings means more to me than just emotions. To have my heart accelerate from the anticipation of having a male bear kiss me would be exciting; to have love from a family, friends, or someone special would answer my dream of dreams; to feel hurt, pain, and anger instead of always being passive would give me reason to keep struggling, hoping, and waiting . . . waiting for a new and more fascinating feeling!

My shelf is clean, the things around me are neat, and I'm still Gretel, the stuffed bear. My owner is looking up at me with a smile. I wonder if she understands how lucky she is to be alive, even though being stuffed is more convenient. I hope she realizes that life is far more exciting than being inert, unemotional, and indifferent like me. I hope she realizes that it takes more than breathing, moving, tasting, or smelling to be alive. It takes feelings. And when those feelings of concern, hurt, pain, anger, surprise, and love leave, then the excitement of life leaves, and an empty shell is left. Yes . . . if only I could have my wish of life topped with a double helping of feelings, I would show people what it is to have the gift of life . . . instead of the futility of convenience.

**Second place award,
informal essay, Microcosm**

Rafts - Disasters at the Bottom of the Pond

by Barbara Boone
Copiah Academy

Have you ever heard it said, mainly by parents and teachers, that books are great educators? My mom says that almost anything can be learned from books. I know of a certainty, that one particular book helped me get the taste of triumph and failure. This all came about from building a simple wooden raft.

My brother David and I, since the time I read the book and we both saw the movie *Huck Finn*, have both been infatuated with the idea of building and floating a raft.

Our first attempt started with the constructing of two twenty-inch poles and ten pieces of the heaviest boards in our barn. We hammered and nailed all day long, occasionally thinking of saying a dreadful, forbidden, dirty word. I'm sure we would have, too, if we had not been afraid of our mother, who we felt sure could hear us, even from the quarter of a mile distance separating us.

When the raft was completed, we were sure we would be able to lift it on our shoulders and carry it downhill to our pond. With a big heave, we yanked it upward and succeeded in pulling up a board and nothing else. After many exasperating tries, we finally sought the help of the rest of our family. Of course, the family dogs came along for good measure. In an hour or so we were able to drag the raft to the pond where it miraculously floated until someone stood on it. After it became waterlogged, our raft sank into a watery grave.

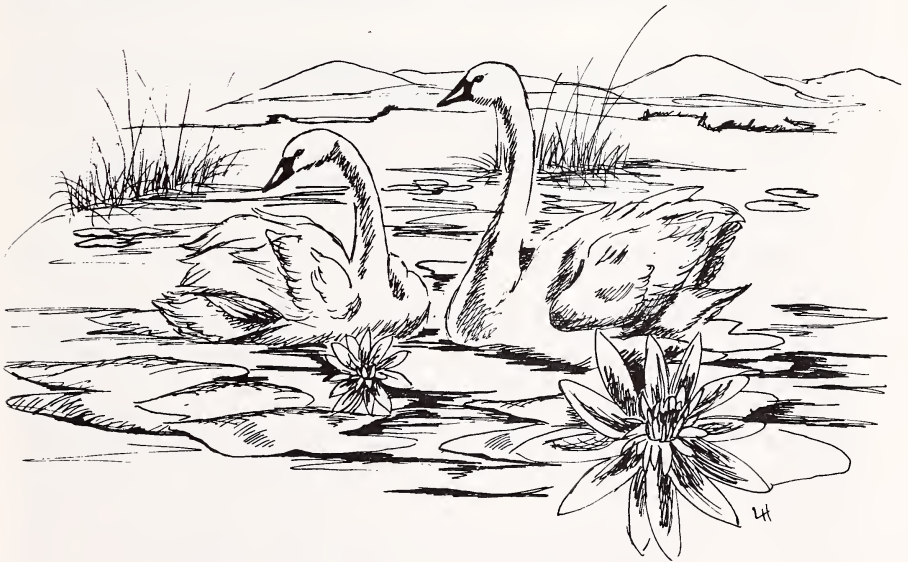
It seemed odd to us that *Huck Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* made a raft in just a few minutes, but David and I were prepared to try again. A few weeks later we knew we had found the proper way to build a raft. This time we built it nearer the pond and used lighter poles. As an extra precaution we put innertubes from some old tires on it. Two packs of nails later and after much hammering and almost thinking those forbidden words, again we had completed our raft. This time, with our overalls rolled up and our paper sailing-hats on, we invited Momma, Carie, our sister, and Pat, our brother, to watch our triumphant crossing of the pond. This time we made it across twice! We tried to go across once more, but that time we had allowed Pat to be on the raft with us. The extra weight, however, made us slowly go down once more with our raft.

After much discussion and mutual consent, we decided to watch *Huck Finn* once more so we could find the magic ingredient of his success.

Our third attempt at building the perfect raft started out fine. I did say started, didn't I? It was a cloudy day but we paid no attention to the sky, for we were immune to rain, anyway. Well, this time, after using the last of Daddy's nails, we succeeded in putting together our combination of boards and logs. With a smart idea that even *Huck Finn* didn't think of, we put barrels under the raft to help it float. We gently pushed the raft into the water and stood in the middle of it for balance. We were pushing our poles to the middle of the pond when I noticed the raft was getting lopsided. As quickly as we felt triumph, we now felt defeat, for the barrels were coming out from under the raft! As we frantically tried to push them back under, I shouted, very politely, mind you, that David did come up with some of the dumbest ideas in the world. Once again, we went down with our raft. As the rain started, David quietly hummed "taps."

In the days that followed and even the years that followed, we stuck to playing Huck Finn on land. We decided our problem was either the wood, the type of water in the pond, or just possibly the fact that we didn't know how to build a raft. You know, it must have been the pond that was our problem.

**First place award,
informal essay, Microcosm,
Junior Division**



The Letter

by Tammy Smith

The sun beat down on the dry clods of dirt in the garden; out in the fields, the heat rose quaveringly from the ground. A bob-white called, "Hey, Bob-White? Are the peas ripe? No, not quite." The heat made the boy drowsy, but there were twenty more hills of corn to plant. No time to sleep. Wiping the sweat from his forehead, he picked up his hoe and dug the holes. After that, in each hole the boy dropped four kernels of seed corn and covered them up with dirt. He thought of the old rhyme as he worked:

One for the blackbird,
One for the crow;
And that will leave
Just two to grow.

It never ceased to amaze him how a huge stalk of corn could grow from such a tiny seed. Farming wasn't so bad, but after eighteen years these pastures, fields, and piney woods had gotten monotonous. He felt it was time for a change.

"Shut that door so's them consarned flies don't get in, boy," his grandfather called from the kitchen as the boy stood at the front screen door. "You done through already?"

"Yes, sir," he answered, and went to the kitchen, where he took a carton of chocolate milk and a thick slice of ham out of the refrigerator.

"Where you goin' now?" the grandfather demanded.

"To the pond. Going fishing." The boy stuffed a potato roll in his mouth.

"Ain't no fish in that consarned pond. I done fished 'em all out."

"Yes, sir."

"Mind you come back afore chore time," the grandfather called. "And close that door behind ya!"

Near the pond the crickets were humming, and as the boy got closer, they seemed to open their mouths wide: "Ya-a-a-a-a!" Bugs with long legs skated across the still water. A kingfisher silently flew by. The scent of warm pine needles wafted to his nose. The boy opened the milk carton, and chocolate milk poured down his throat, chilling his chest as it went down; he ate a piece of the ham and noticed its fine texture and saltiness. Now and then, something below the water would rise to the surface and, "ploop," send circles in waves, all the way to the banks. It could be a fish, it could be a turtle. He didn't really care. He had only wanted to get away from the house and think. The letter was hidden under the mattress of his bed, where it had been for three days. At first, it was exciting; now, he had thought about it so much, his mind felt dull. The nagging question "How do I tell Grandpa?" throbbed continually in his head until it became a chant with no meaning. He had kept away from the old man, thereby avoiding any direct confrontation. But the time had come. He slowly got up and headed for the house. How to tell him? Grandpa had always insisted on honesty, the truth. All right, he'd get it.

"Catch any fish, boy?" the old man asked.

"Uh-no. Grandpa, I've got to talk to you about something."

"Told you you wouldn't catch nuthin'."

"It's about a letter I got a few days ago."

"And I tole you I done fished 'em all out."

"See, I took this test a while back. It's a test that shows what all you've learned in high school, and it's called the ACT. Well, I did pretty good, and one of the schools I put down on the form wants me there. They sent me this letter and —"

"Betcha couldn't even git one leetle brim now, could ja?"

The boy stamped his foot. "Grandpa, are you even listening to me!"

"Well, what did ja say?"

"I'm going to college."

"You funnin' me. But it ain't funny."

"I'm not funnin' you. I've been wanting to for — a long time. And now I can."

The grandfather licked his lips and reached for his snuff can. "Look here," he said, after a while. "College ain't for a man. Oh, I know they's what you'd call men there, but they ain't men men. They cain't do no work like us. All they know how to do is read them books and spout words above your head. Ain't none of us ever gone to college. Waste of time." He dipped a stick in the snuff and stuck it in his mouth with finality.

"Grandpa," the boy sighed, "you don't have to be a sissy to go to college. Nowadays you have to go there to get a decent job."

"And I s'pose farming ain't a decent job?"

"I didn't say that. But you have to have a big farm to make any profit now. Our few little acres wouldn't amount to much. Why, what crops we do make is just enough for us to eat. Right now we're living on your Social Security check."

"So you goin' to college is gonna change all that? And just how do you think you goin'? College costs money."

"I've done told you, Grandpa, they're paying my way. It's a scholarship."

The old man's eyes narrowed. "Don't sound right, them payin' for it."

"But it is right. Wait; I'll go get the letter." The boy went to his room. What a drab little place, he thought. The walls were of weatherboarding, once painted a greenish-blue but now mostly gray. A picture in an ornate oval frame of his great-grandfather hung above his bed. It had always been there. Matthew Little looked sternly down on his younger namesake, as if to demand, "What do you think you're doing, boy?" Matt looked in the mirror over the chest of drawers. No wonder he was named for this long-dead man. They were almost identical, from their awkward ranginess to their dark brown hair. Why, even now as he scowled at his reflection, even without a moustache, he was practically the spittin' image —

"You all right in there?" his grandfather called from the kitchen.

"Yes, sir. Just a minute." And he got the letter. "Now," he said, coming back. "In this letter, they say I have a full scholarship. I don't pay for anything. Books, tuition, room and board, meals — it's all covered."

The old man peered at the letterhead. "Uni — University of Virginia. Why you want to go 'way up north?"

Matt laughed. "They did fight on our side, Grandpa. It's not that far away."

His grandfather shook his head. "I don't know, I don't know. I tole your daddy I'd see you stayed here, keep the place up. Now you want to get away."

"For heaven's sake, Grandpa, I'll come back. It's not like I'll never return."

Look; what do you say to me going for one semester?"

"How long's that?"

"September to December. That's not long."

"S'pose you do go. What you gonna do, or whatever it is you call it?"

"Major in? I'm thinking of forestry. Looking after the land. How's that for a happy medium? I'll come back to the county and be a forester here. After all, Mississippi's just full of woods. So whadaya say?"

The grandfather looked out the window. "So you want to see somethin' else besides our twenty acres, I s'pose. No, don't tell me different. I know that's what it is. Land my daddy bought hisself —"

Matt did not listen to the rest. It was all too familiar, how his grandfather's daddy had scratched and sweated and broken his back and kept his fingers crossed, making the land work for him. In fact, the whole conversation had a familiar ring. The old man versus the young boy, tradition versus liberation. But suddenly he heard something new:

"—and I guess you are just like him. Left home in 'aught three 'cause they was too stuck in they ways. Ha, ha! Boy, you just like him! Never really thought of it, 'cept when your Aunt Mae says you look like him in the picture in yonder. Maybe it ain't such a bad idea. You got that money saved up from mill work; that oughta get cha there. Ain't a bad idea. How's that for an old man a'changin' his ways all of a sudden?"

Matt was surprised. "Well, Grandpa, I sure am glad you see. I don't really know what to say 'cept 'thank you.' "

The old man nodded and smiled.

"I think I'll go outside for a while," Matt said.

The sun was beginning to set, a pulsing orange ball behind the silhouetted trees of the woods. An owl hooted.

"I cook for myself; who cooks for you all?" Matt said softly, remembering the things his grandfather had told him when he was much younger. The owl hooted again. Yes, that was exactly what the bird was saying. The boy wondered if there were owls in Virginia. Did the same sun rise and set there?

He was being sentimental — and silly. He shook his head and went back in the house, to his room. The first thing he saw was the picture of Great-Grandfather Matthew. Matt grinned. "Thanks, old boy," he said, and turned back to the kitchen.

**First place award,
short fiction,
Mississippi Junior College
Creative Writing Association**

I Felt The Wind

by Lori Wusterbarth
Brookhaven High School

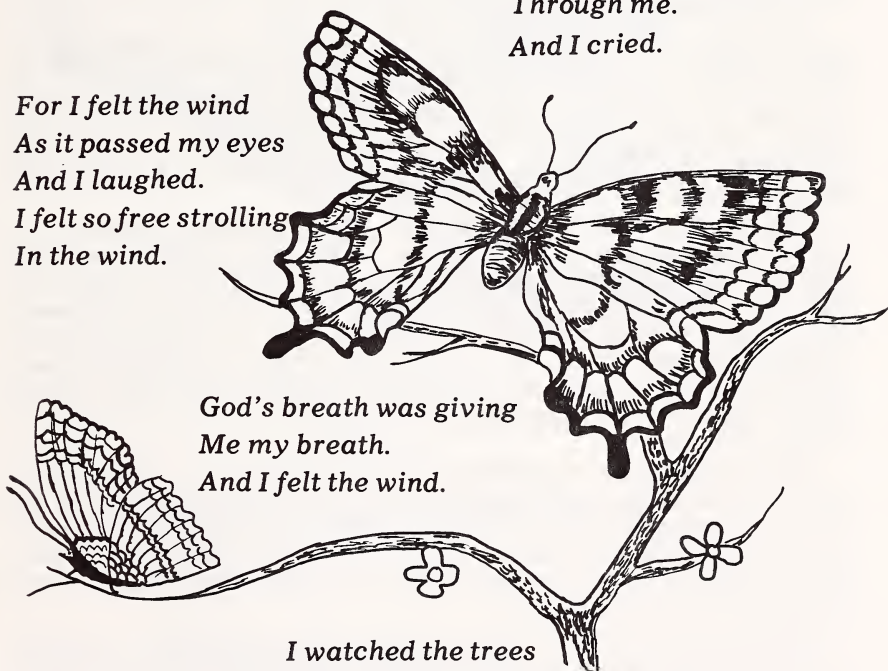
And the birds sang
As I walked through
the garden and
I felt the wind.

The cool breeze,
When it touched my
Skin, sent the best
Feeling all the way
Through me.
And I cried.

For I felt the wind
As it passed my eyes
And I laughed.
I felt so free strolling
In the wind.

God's breath was giving
Me my breath.
And I felt the wind.

I watched the trees
Swaying, and the birds
Flew in the wind.
I felt the wind.



First place
scholarship award,
poetry, Microcosm,
Junior Division

The Key to Improving Our World: Recombinant DNA

by Lisa Phillips

Until today, man's discoveries have dealt with the destruction of life. Man discovered how to split atoms — and annihilated whole cities. The entire world is haunted by the nightmare of a nuclear holocaust. Man has turned chemicals into a deadly war weapon that not only kills effectively but also destroys the environment. However, man has finally made a constructive discovery: recombinant DNA. Man has unlocked the key to creating life.

Recombinant DNA offers hope to those people suffering from diseases, such as diabetes and hemophilia, in which the treatments are scarce and costly. Our supplies of vital substances are indeed dwindling fast. However, scientists now have the technology to splice the gene responsible for the needed substance into a common, ordinary bacterium, which then begins to produce that substance. Insulin is now being produced in inexhaustible quantities by bacteria with the animal gene spliced into their own genetic code.

Recombinant DNA is also throwing out a life-line to cancer patients in the form of interferon, an extremely expensive and rare substance formed by human white blood cells. It has already been used successfully in cancer treatments, but the present cost is \$10,000 per treatment, and the present world supply is enough to cure only 600 patients. However, scientists are predicting that within a year the common bacteria *E. coli* will be producing interferon in unlimited amounts at about \$10 per treatment.

The uses of recombinant DNA are not restricted to the medical field only. It has great potential in agriculture as well. A bacterium capable of providing plants such as corn and wheat with the nitrogen they need has been worked out. This would prevent the plants from stripping the soil of its nitrogen and lessen the need for expensive fertilizers. Scientists also have on the drawing board antibodies and enzymes that can be used as herbicides and pesticides. These substances would attack only the pests and would not harm other, useful creatures. They also would not leave any toxic residue in the soil to run off and pollute water sources.

The future also looks very bright in the ecology field with recombinant DNA there to lend a helping hand. Scientists have already made and tested an oil-eater, an organism that can eat two-thirds of the materials found in crude oil. Its wastes and leftover products can in turn be used by marine life as food. Other "friends" are being worked on that will reduce waste of our resources and pollution of our environment.

However, many people look at recombinant DNA with horror, saying that nothing good will come from man's attempt to play God. They are afraid a potentially dangerous organism will escape or they argue that man is tampering with evolution and will upset the balance of nature. They overlook the fact that these organisms have been made incapable of surviving outside the controlled conditions of the lab. And they forget that evolution is actually a tamperer itself, a violent and random selection of organisms fit to survive in a particular environment. Narrow-minded people, seeking to ban all recombinant DNA experiments in the United States, say these experiments are dangerous, many totally blinding themselves to the benefits waiting to be reaped from this marvelous technology.

Scientists realize that totally unrestricted recombination experiments do have dangerous potentials, and so they have set up strict safety guidelines for all to follow. We must trust the men who know best in this brand new technology so that we can make sure this life-giving discovery is not twisted into a means of biological warfare. An informed and observant public must keep this discovery to its original purpose: a means to help man rather than destroy his life and his world.

**Second place award,
formal essay,
Mississippi Junior College
Creative Writing Association**



Reflection

by Tammy Smith

*You walked away without looking back,
Cold and brisk as the frigid morning.
The bitter wind whipped my hair in my eyes,
Depriving me of a last glance
Of your deceptively naive face.
I recalled a summer almost two years past
When I first met you -
And my, how you've grown.*

**Second place
poetry award, Microcosm**

Tartan Triumph

by Eric Storm
Brookhaven High School

The dense fog was finally breaking as the band of Scottish warriors neared the end of their return trek home. However, the horses seemed skittish as they approached the homes of their village. The village was no longer. Charred remains of houses, strewn bodies and lonely survivors marked the site of the hamlet.

Fear struck the hearts of this fierce band. Hurriedly they searched for their families and unabashedly they wept upon finding the dead. During this whirlwind of shock the oldest warrior calmly guided his steed to the remains of his hut. He had not a family, only a faithful retriever whom he loved for his companionship. He, the dog, and his horse Trevalian had often gone hunting and were a cunning threesome. Now he found that beloved animal dead, scorched to a gruesome black and bloated figure. This was the work of Grog.

Far up the mountain lived Grog, the beast of a dragon. The primordial predator of the lowland Scots, he had been inactive for many years. Yet McEwen, the elder warrior, could remember the times when his father had battled the dragon. Now the deadly menace had returned, as gruesome as ever.

A tear rolled, and then a stream trickled down the proud warrior's face and through his crusty gray beard as he removed the collar from the scorched corpse. Resolutely he fastened it to the hilt of his sword. Around him flowed the survivors and other warriors as they fled for the safety of the woodlands. Yet he would not follow; he would visit the mountainside cave of Grog.

Trevalian gently snorted in the misty air as McEwen shoveled the last of the dirt onto the grave of his retriever. The other men had passed by on their way to the woodlands and expressed their condolences; however, none would travel with McEwen to combat Grog. Trevalian and McEwen would scale the mountain alone.

Morning dawned on another day as the rising sun warmed the bones of the old warrior and soothed the aching joints of his battle-scarred horse. Provisions had been cooked and packed. The ascension to the den of Grog would begin.

Trevalian carefully trod through the rocky terrain as McEwen scanned the slope for the cave. The hours passed and the temperature dropped swiftly as the wind whipped fiercely in the face of man and animal; Trevalian's joints a-thritically stiffened. No longer could he bear McEwen's weight on the climb. The warrior continued the trek while leading his weakened horse by the bridle. Through the snow and slush they advanced as they neared the cave of Grog.

A hideous odor pervaded as they approached the den. Obviously Grog had eaten well the night before as the remains of a cow carcass lay strewn about the entrance. This was the realm of the butchering beast that had plagued the Scots seemingly forever. "A fitting grave for the killer of so many," contemplated the battle-worn McEwen.

Trevalian began to pound the frozen turf with his hooves as the spirit of combat lubricated his aching joints with adrenalin. Once more his master would mount him in battle and once more they would leave victorious.

Gripping the retriever's collar in fond reminiscence, McEwen swung onto the back of Trevalian. For the burned villages, for the slaughtered friends, for his beloved dog he would challenge fate again by entering battle. There would

be no retreat. McEwen unsheathed his oft-used sword; justice would be served.

McEwen charged into the cave weaving Trevalian through the stalagmites, using the rock formations for protective cover from the serpent's fiery breath. Foray after foray yielded scant results as the dragon contested every advance.

As the combat wore on, Grog assumed the offensive and rider and horse were severely tested. In a moment of no action the wily dragon devised a devious scheme of deception. Feigning an injury, he invited attack. Trevalian and McEwen darted in for the kill, only to feel a ruthless swish of the dragon's tail. Knocked sprawling by the impact, only McEwen could regain his feet. He fought on alone.

Dazed by numerous blows and wounded countless times, the old warrior miraculously parried every thrust of the dragon and dealt stinging counterstrokes. McEwen skillfully dodged another blow and then drove home a thrust to the eye of Grog. The beast, reeling back in agony, presented McEwen with the long awaited opportunity. With another swift thrust, the warrior slashed open the throat of the mighty Grog.

The ordeal over, McEwen withdrew to his wounded horse and comforted the shivering animal. Together they hovered for warmth as they waited through the night.

The next morning a column of brave Scottish warriors made their way to the cave. Upon rushing into the cave to gloriously slay the dragon and return as heroes, the warriors found their enemy dead. To the side of the cave they discovered also the old warrior and his charger, both dead.

**First place
scholarship award,
short fiction, Microcosm
Junior Division**



A Look At "Almos' A Man"

by Patti Jean Page

Adolescence is a perplexing time of life when teenagers find themselves happy and confident one minute and moody and frightened the next. Many teenagers are in a stage when they are bored with toys, yet not emotionally prepared for adult responsibilities. Still, they constantly ask to be treated like adults. "You're Growing Up," a booklet by Teenform, says that "learning doesn't happen all at once." The booklet says that parents, as well as the teenagers, need time to adjust to changes in life as one matures. Stories and books have been written on adolescence that have helped adults and teenagers better understand the process. In the short story, "Almos' A Man," Richard Wright tells of a young Negro boy who, in an effort to become a man, buys a gun, accidentally shoots a mule, and runs away while his parents ignore his budding maturity.

Dave Sanders works for a paltry two dollars a month on a farm owned by Jim Hawkins. At age seventeen, Dave feels that he is "almos' a man" and he desperately wants a gun. The poorly-educated teenager thinks that behind the cold barrel of a gun he will be treated like the man he wants to be. Dave secures a left-hand wheeler pistol from the owner of the town store after his mother reluctantly gives him two dollars for the gun's purchase. Instead of going straight home with the gun as his mother had commanded, Dave stays in the fields admiring and handling the gun. At work the next morning, Dave decides to shoot the loaded pistol which he has carried strapped to his calf with a strip of flannel material. After plowing two rows, Dave stops. He is so frightened, that when he shoots, the pistol slips in his hand and the bullet punctures Jenny, the plow mule. Shocked, Dave plugs the mule's wound with soil. Jenny dies. Dave lies about the accident at first, but when his mother reveals that he had a gun, he shamefully confesses. Jim Hawkins decides that the two dollars Dave earns a month will be used in payment of the dead mule for two years. Humiliated, Dave goes home but returns to the field the same night. This time, he shoots the gun successfully. A train chugs around toward him, and with his pocketed pistol, he makes a decision: he will go somewhere else where he will be treated like a man.

Owning a gun is something almost every boy desires. The power of a gun makes the boy feel that he is a man. Parents, like the Bob Sanders, are reluctant sometimes to permit their child to own or even shoot a gun. Although many youngsters are mature enough at twelve or thirteen to handle a gun, many are not that mature. This fact has been proved by numerous instances in which a child has accidentally shot a parent, brother, sister, friend or himself.

Teenagers today want to be allowed to grow up, like Dave does, but sometimes parents and peers treat them like children. In "Almos' A Man," Dave's mother calls him "Nigger," "boy," "fool" and says "You ain't nothing but a boy yit." When Dave is not accepted by the teasing boys in the field, he, like other teenagers do when not accepted, wants to run away. This is one of the main reasons Dave wants a gun. He wants the boys' respect and he thinks that if he has a gun they will respect him. Dave bases manhood, maturity and acceptance on power. Dave mistakenly equates these traits with the gun.

Richard Wright expresses a lesson in maturity in his short story. Maturity is a trait all humans strive to gain. In "Almos' A Man," the pistol may be a symbol of the image formed by society of boys and men. Maturity for boys and

men is pictured as one who is strong, tough and totally mature in every situation. Along with maturity, Dave needs freedom to grow and expand his knowledge because he spends most of his time working in the fields. Dave does not have a gun, horse, or any other possession that requires responsibility. The money Dave earns in the story is used for buying school clothes, not for having possessions that would develop responsibility. Dave is denied this step in maturity. Richard Wright might be telling the reader that children need close supervision, that they should not be given toys beyond their ability or that they should be allowed to develop responsibility gradually. Wright could be warning parents and prospective parents that problems such as Dave's can happen to their own children.

Dave is definitely wrong in what he does. The accident is his fault because he disobeys his mother and lies to her. The accident is partly the Sanders' fault for not teaching Dave about a gun before age seventeen. Dave is backward and restricted. Society shows that sometimes people who are restricted try to escape as Dave does by running away. He is embarrassed, frightened, in debt and scheduled for a beating by his father. When Dave succeeds in shooting the pistol at the conclusion of "Almos' A Man," he feels a surge of maturity. The train, along with the pistol, is his ticket to manhood.

**First place award,
formal essay, Microcosm**

Thanatophobia

by Andy White

When Dr. Folbert entered his office after coming back from lunch, his secretary, Miss O'Connor, was there waiting for him.

"Doctor, Mr. Trebloff is waiting to see you. He's been waiting for some time. You're late, you know." Miss O'Connor shook her head to show her disapproval of Dr. Folbert's lack of punctuality. Miss O'Connor was a neat, orderly, efficient spinster of forty-five, who wore glasses that hid what must have once been a lovely face. Miss O'Connor ran Dr. Folbert's office the same as she ran her own life. She was highly organized, extremely neat, always on time and always nice to those who were nice to her. Dr. Folbert, like everyone else who had to be around her for any length of time, hated Miss O'Connor's guts.

Dr. Folbert looked at his watch even though he knew that he was late. He had been late for the past few months now. Every morning he found it harder to get out of bed and go to his office. And once there he found it even more difficult to listen to the insane and bizzare problems of his patients. Who were these people? And what gave them the idea that he could help them? Where had he ever gotten the idea that he, of all people, could help them? From the University, he remembered now. From studying Freud, and Watson and Piaget. Then he remembered something else. He turned to Miss O'Connor. "But today is only Tuesday," he said. "Mr. Trebloff's appointment isn't till Thursday."

"I know what day this is, doctor," Miss O'Connor was insulted, "but he said it was an emergency."

"What is it this time?" Dr. Folbert asked. "Are the Russians testing some new kind of germ warfare in his apartment?"

Miss O'Connor was aghast. "Dr. Folbert," she cried, "you shouldn't say such things. To think that a man in your position . . . Why, I don't know what has gotten into you lately. You act almost as though you resent these people for coming to you for help."

Dr. Folbert thought about that for a moment. That was the problem; he wasn't sure that he was helping them. But Miss O'Connor was right. He not only shouldn't say such things; he shouldn't even think them. Of course he was helping his clients. He may not have all the answers, true, but he knew where to look. And the one thing he did have was compassion for his fellow man. Or at least, he thought he had it. Of course I still have the compassion, he told himself. And with that he dismissed the subject from his mind and looked back to Miss O'Connor.

"I'm sorry," he told her. "Please send Mr. Trebloff in." He then walked to his desk and took his seat behind it.

★★

Mr. Trebloff was a nut. This was his third session with Dr. Folbert. Dr. Folbert had treated many people with the same problem as Trebloff and frankly he was bored by him and all his silly fears. Dr. Folbert had spent the first two sessions pretending to be getting to know Mr. Trebloff and setting the atmosphere for their future sessions together. Mr. Trebloff had spent the first two wondering how many more eighty-dollar sessions it was going to take before Dr. Folbert got around to helping him with his problem. Mr. Trebloff's problem was fear of death. He was a hypochondriac; he had every phobia in the

book, and some that Dr. Folbert was sure weren't even in the book. Mr. Trebloff worried about things like cancer and tuberculosis, heart failure and tumors, kidney infections and liver disorders, and a thousand other diseases that he was constantly reading up on and sending away for more information about. He also worried about cars and bridges and solid brick walls. A car was a two ton pile of steel that was capable of crushing the life out of innocent pedestrians like himself. Mr. Trebloff was an innocent pedestrian because he was too terrified to ride in any sort of automobile; they were constantly running off bridges and into solid brick walls.

When Mr. Trebloff entered Dr. Folbert's office, it was plain to see that he was very upset. His hands were shaking at his sides and his normally pale, thin face looked even paler than usual. When Dr. Folbert noticed him, he motioned him to the chair in front of his desk to sit down.

"Or if you prefer," said Dr. Folbert, "you can lie there on the couch."

"I'll just sit, thank you," answered Trebloff.

"Miss O'Connor said there was some type of emergency," began Dr. Folbert. "What seems to be the trouble?"

Mr. Trebloff blushed a little. "There's no emergency," he said. "I just said that so you'd see me."

"I see," said Dr. Folbert. "Well, Mr. Trebloff, how have you been since our last session?"

"Scared," answered Trebloff.

"Scared?"

"To death."

"Of what?" asked Folbert, afraid he was going to laugh.

"Dying."

"Oh, well, we all have that fear, Mr. Trebloff. We mustn't let it get to us, though."

"You don't understand, Doc. I could die any minute."

"We all could, Mr. Trebloff," Dr. Folbert was smiling, trying to console him.

"Exactly."

"What's that? Exactly what? I don't understand, Mr. Trebloff."

"Exactly."

"Exactly what?"

"You don't understand."

"Mr. Trebloff, is there something you're trying to tell me? Are you ill?"

"Well, I hardly see how I couldn't be ill, Doc."

"Then you are ill? If you need medical attention as well as psychological therapy then you would want to consult a psychiatrist. They are qualified to treat physical as well as mental disorders."

"Disorders? Who has any disorders?"

"I'm sorry I used that word, Mr. Trebloff. Then you're not ill?"

"Well, I hardly see how I couldn't be ill, Doc."

"Mr. Trebloff, you're just not making sense. Now are you or are you not ill?"

"I told you, Doc, I don't see how I could possibly be well."

Dr. Folbert moaned, "This is getting us nowhere, Mr. Trebloff. I can't help you if you refuse to cooperate. Now if you insist on . . ."

"Do you know how many diseases there are, Doc?"

"What?" Dr. Folbert relaxed some. He knew what was coming.

"Diseases, do you know how many diseases there are? Well, neither do I, but there are plenty I can tell you that much. And they're finding new ones everyday. And you don't even have to be born yet to get them either, Doc. There are hundreds of diseases that a person can be born with. I'll tell you, Doc, it amazes me that any of us even make it out of the womb. I guess that's why they call it the miracle of birth, huh, Doc? And if you do last long enough to get yourself born, things just get worse. The number of diseases available to you once you're out of the womb is astronomical. In order to live you've got to breathe, right? Do you know what's in the air we breathe, Doc? Why there are bacteria and viruses and all kinds of germs in this very room that can get inside our bodies and put us out of it in no time at all if our systems are out of balance the slightest bit. And they're not only in the air, either, they're everywhere. They're on everything we touch and everything we eat. Can you believe the things people eat these days? How can they do it, Doc? It's disgusting, that's what it is. Don't you agree, Doc? Doc?"

"Oh, oh yes. Yes, I suppose I . . ."

"Don't they realize that a man can die of a common cold? I mean it doesn't take some major disease like cancer or T. B. to put you under, Doc. Speaking of cancer, when was the last time you picked up a paper without reading about a new cause of cancer being discovered? I'm beginning to think that just living causes cancer, Doc. And if they're not finding some new cause of cancer they're finding some new form of it. Do you know how many different kinds of cancer there are? There's lung cancer, skin cancer, cancer of the stomach, cancer of the thyroid, mouth, throat, blood . . . I bet there is a different kind of cancer for every cell, tissue, and organ of our bodies. There are specialized diseases out there, Doc. If one doesn't get you another one will. And some of them you never even know you have until it's too late. I had an aunt once, God rest her soul, who had leukemia. She was in and out of hospitals for four years. Finally the doctors gave up, told her she had about six months left, and they let her go home to spend them with her family. She came out of the hospital on a Monday. On Friday of the same week they found her dead, not from leukemia, but from some other type of cancer that she never even knew she had. And, to top it all off, the cancer she died from was curable. How do you like that, Doc?! Oh, don't get me wrong, she would have died anyway. If not from one of the two cancers then from something else. What can you do, Doc? Everytime you breathe there's a chance that you're inhaling something that will prove fatal. Every little move we make may be our last. I mean a man can be killed getting in and out of his own bathtub, right? And that's another thing, Doc! Accidents! You got a family, Doc? Doc?"

Dr. Folbert was staring off into space. But this time it wasn't from apathy. He was trying to remember how long it had been since he had had a physical checkup from his doctor. He gave up trying to remember as the sound of Trebloff's voice began to register on his mind again.

"Doc?"

"I'm sorry, what was your question?"

"You okay, Doc?"

"What? Oh. Yes, yes, of course. Now, what was your question?"

"I asked if you had a family."

"Oh, yes. A wife and two kids."

"God. You must worry yourself sick. Are they young, your kids?"

"Yes. One is four, the other is six."

"Geez! I don't see how you keep your sanity, Doc. There are so many things or little ones to get into. Not only little ones, either, everybody else, too. That's another thing."

"What? What's another thing?"

"Accidents, Doc, I'm talking about accidents."

"I thought we were talking about diseases."

"You should pay attention, Doc. If you were paying attention you'd know that we are now talking about accidents. But we can talk some more about diseases if you want to. I could talk all day about diseases. You want to hear some more about diseases, Doc?"

"No, no, that's all right. Just go ahead."

"Yeah, well, like I was saying, anybody who manages to stay healthy long enough will probably be run over by a bus, or drowned, or electrocuted or something like that. It's terrifying, Doc. I don't mind telling you it takes all the courage I can muster just to make the short walk from my apartment to your office every week. Do you realize how many accidents I could have between here and there? I could be run over by some speeding idiot in one of those two-ton piles of steel and rubber, or knocked in the head by something casually tossed from a twentieth-floor window of someone's apartment. I could fall down and be trampled to death by a mob of little old ladies hurrying downtown to spend their social security checks. I never leave my apartment unless it's absolutely necessary, Doc. And I'm still not safe! Like I said, a man can be killed getting in and out of his own bathtub. Right? It's a fact that 90 per cent of all accidents happen in the home. You really should learn all these facts, Doc. I'm surprised you didn't know these things. What do they teach you at those universities anyway?"

"Never mind. Anyway, what I'm saying is that a man isn't safe anywhere. He's not catching some fatal disease, he's falling off a ladder and breaking his neck while changing a light bulb or being drowned or electrocuted or mugged or murdered. And that's another thing, Doc. Have you noticed the crime rate lately? These are violent times, Doc. As if there weren't already enough ways for people to die they have to kill each other too. Everyday you read about people being shot or stabbed or mugged or raped or murdered. Don't you read the papers, Doc? You really should you know? But, I suppose that you've never really thought about all this stuff I've been telling you, have you, Doc? Oh, don't feel bad. Few people do think about it. I mean I spend every minute of every day and every ounce of energy I've got trying to stay alive. And then I see these idiots risking limb and life to score six points on a football field and jumping anyone on motorcycles or climbing mountains because they're there, or some other fool thing like that. And I ask myself, how can they do it? Don't they realize that there are already enough ways to be killed? How can they do it? The only answer I can give myself is that they've never really stopped to think about it. Not really. I have though. I've thought about it. And then you ask me why I'm scared. I'm scared because I've got sense enough to be scared. I could be dying right this minute, Doc! It wouldn't surprise me a bit. In fact, what would surprise me would be to find out that I'm not dying right this minute.

crazy? You're all trying to kill me, aren't you?' Like that. So he didn't eat anything the whole time he was in there. It was really something. He wouldn't even let his wife in."

"How'd they get him out?" Trebloff was concerned.

"Well, finally, after about four days, his wife agreed to let some people from the mental institution come and get him. I reckon he would have stayed in there and starved to death if she hadn't. Ain't that one for the papers? Ha, ha. It was really something. You should have been here. When the men from the mental institution got here they had to bust the door down to get in. Doc was packed up in the far corner and when they started toward him he held up a can of disinfectant and started screaming, 'Don't come any closer. Don't come any closer.' Ha. What do you make of that? They got him though. They had to carry him out over their shoulders. And all the time he was trying to wring himself free and yelling, 'You're trying to kill me. I know what you're trying to do. You're all trying to kill me.' And when they got him out here into the hall his wife went over to him and told him that nobody was trying to kill him but that they were all trying to help him. 'Look at you,' she said. 'You haven't slept or eaten in days.' Then she held out a sandwich and then at her and he said, 'Et tu Brute?' and then he started threshing about again and screaming, 'You're all trying to kill me. You're all trying to kill me.' They took him out just like that, with him screaming and trying to get away, and put him in the truck. They finally got him loaded up though. Ain't that something?" He stooped down and started gathering his tools.

"What happened next?" Trebloff asked.

"Nothing," he said. "They put him in the truck and drove away." Trebloff thought about it for awhile and was about to turn and leave when the maintenance man looked up from where he was gathering his tools and asked, 'What do you suppose got into him anyway?'"

He hesitated before answering. "He was scared."

"Scared?" he said. "Of what?"

"Dying." Trebloff said matter-of-factly.

"Well now, I reckon we're all afraid of dying. It ain't no reason to go crazy though." he said.

"You don't understand," Trebloff said, "we could die any minute."

"Was he sick or something?" he asked.

"Well, I don't see how he could have not been sick . . ."

**First place award,
short fiction, Microcosm**

Contributors

Barbara Boone, a ninth grader at Copiah Academy, enjoys running 880 relays.

Don Hardy, from Rugby, North Dakota, is a sophomore art major. Don designed the cover for the 1981 Junior College Writer.

Patti Jean Page, a sophomore from Georgetown, is Co-Lin Wolf Tales editor and is head Collette.

Lisa Phillips is a graduate of Brookhaven High and is majoring in accounting.

Holly Sides, a freshman from Georgetown, is a physical therapy major.

Tammy Smith, a freshman from Brookhaven, won in the Microcosm competition as a junior and senior in high school.

Eric Storm is a football manager at Brookhaven High School.

Andy White, whose poem "The Explorer" won first place in Microcosm last year, is a freshman from New Hebron.

Sara Williamson, a freshman secretarial major, is from Monticello.

Lori Wusterbarth, a native of Wisconsin, is a senior at Brookhaven High School.

Microcosm¹ would like to express thanks to the English faculty at Co-Lin for their help in judging the high school and college competition.

Space was not available to print all of the award winners; therefore, we would like to recognize them here.

Junior Division Competition

Poetry:

"Contrast," by Carla Webb, Brookhaven High School, second place

"A Crowded Wood," by Cynthia Bailey, Brookhaven Academy, third place

"Philosophy for Tuesday," by Lisa Johnson, Crystal Springs Attendance Center, honorable mention

Short Fiction:

"The Last Trip," Pam Hutcherson, Brookhaven High School, second place

"The Fugitive," James Heathman, Adams County Christian School, third place

Informal Essay:

"Fishing," by Mark Kluz, Crystal Springs Attendance Center, second place

Senior Division Competition

Formal Essay:

"Mental Illness in Selected Stories," Belynda Ballard, third place

Informal Essay:

"Ride 'Em Cowboy," Patti Jean Page, third place

"The Sovereign Group," Tony Davis, honorable mention

R. D.



